



CHAPTER I.

At the Home of Hugo Chevet.

It was early autumn for the clusters of grapes above me were already purple, and the forest leaves were tinged with red. And yet the air was soft, and the golden bars of sun flickered down on the work in my lap through the laced branches of the trellis. The work was but a pretense, for I had fled the house to escape the voice of Monsieur Cassion who was still urging my uncle to accompany him on his journey into the wilderness. They sat in the great room before the fireplace, drinking, and I had heard enough already to tell me there was treachery on foot against the Sieur de la Salle. To be sure it was nothing to me, a girl knowing naught of such intrigue, yet I had not forgotten the day, three years before, when this La Salle, with others of his company, had halted before the Ursuline convent, and the sisters bade them welcome for the night. 'Twas my part to help serve, and he had stroked my hair in tenderness. I had sung to them, and watched his face in the firelight as he listened. Never would I forget that face, nor believe evil of such a man. Not from the lips of Cassion nor even from the governor, La Barre.

I recalled it all now, as I sat there in the silence, pretending to work, how we watched them embark in their canoes and disappear, the Indian paddlers bending to their task, and Monsieur la Salle, standing, bareheaded as he waved farewell. Beyond him was the dark face of one they called De Tonty, and in the first boat a mere boy lifted his rugged hat. I know not why, but the memory of that lad was clearer than all those others, for he had met me in the hall and we had talked long in the great window ere the sister came, and took me away. So I remembered him, and his name, Rene d'Artigny. And in all those years I heard no more. Into the black wilderness they swept and were lost to those of us at home in New France.

No doubt there were those who knew—Frontenac, Bigot, those who ruled over at Quebec—but 'twas not a matter supposed to interest a girl, and so no word came to me. Once I asked my Uncle Chevet, and he replied in anger with only a few sentences, bidding me hold my tongue; yet he said enough so that I knew the Sieur de la Salle lived and had built a fort far away, and was buying furs of the Indians. It was this that brought jealousy and hatred. Once Monsieur Cassion came and stopped with us, and as I waited on him and Uncle Chevet, I caught words which told me that Frontenac was La Salle's friend, and would listen to no charges brought against him. They talked of a new governor; yet I learned but little, for Cassion attempted to kiss me, and I would wait on him no more.

Then Frontenac was recalled to France, and La Barre was governor. How pleased my Uncle Chevet was when the news came, and he rapped the table with his glass and exclaimed: "Ah! but now we will pluck out the claws of this Sieur de la Salle, and send him where he belongs." But he would explain nothing, until a week later. Cassion came up the river in his canoe with Indian paddlers, and stopped to hold conference. The man treated me with much gallantry, so that I questioned him, and he seemed happy to answer that La Barre had already dispatched a party under Chevalier de Baugis, of the King's Dragoons to take command of La Salle's Fort St. Louis in the Illinois country. La Salle had returned, and was already at Quebec, but Cassion grinned as he boasted that the new governor would not even give him audience. Bah! I despised the man, yet I lingered beside him, and thus learned that La Salle's party consisted of but two voyageurs, and the young Sieur d'Artigny. I was glad enough when he went away, though I gave him my hand to kiss, and waved to him bravely at the landing. And now he was back again, bearing a message from La Barre, and seeking volunteers for some western voyage of profit. 'Twas of no interest to me unless my uncle joined in the enterprise, yet I was kind enough, for he brought with him word of the governor's ball at Quebec, and had won the pledge of Chevet to take me there with him. I could be gracious to him for that and it was on my gown I worked, as the two planned and talked in secret. What they did was nothing to me now—all my thought was on the ball. What would you? I was 17.

The grape trellis ran down toward

BEYOND the FRONTIER

A STORY OF EARLY DAYS

by RANDALL PARRISH

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the river landing, and from where I sat in the cool shadow, I could see the broad water gleaming in the sun. Suddenly, as my eyes uplifted, the dark outline of a canoe swept into the vista, and the splashing paddles turned the prow inward toward our landing. I did not move, although I watched with interest, for it was not the time of year for Indian traders, and these were white men. I could see those at the paddles, voyageurs, with gay cloths about their heads; but the one in the stern wore a hat, the brim concealing his face, and a blue coat. I knew not who it could be until the prow touched the bank, and he stepped ashore. Then I knew, and bent low over my sewing, as though I had seen nothing, although my heart beat fast. Through lowered lashes I saw him give brief order to the men, and then advance toward the house alone. Ah! but this was not the slender, laughing-eyed boy of three years before. The wilderness had made of him a man—a soldier. He plucked an instant to gaze about, and held his hat in his hand, the sun touching his tanned cheeks, and flecking the long, light colored hair.

"Mademoiselle," he said gently, "pardon me, but is not this the home of Hugo Chevet, the fur trader?"

I looked up into his face and bowed as he swept the earth with his hat, seeing at a glance that he had no remembrance of me.

"Yes," I answered. "If you seek him, rap on the door beyond."

"'Tis not so much Chevet I seek," he said, showing no inclination to pass me, "but one whom I understood to be his guest—Monsieur Francois Cassion."

"The man is here," I answered quickly, yet unable to conceal my surprise, "but you will find him no friend to Sieur de la Salle."

"Ah!" and he stared at me intently. "In the name of the saints, what is the meaning of this? You know me then?"

I bowed, yet my eyes remained hidden.

"I knew you once as monsieur's friend," I said, almost regretting my indiscretion, "and have been told you travel in his company."

"You knew me once!" he laughed. "Surely that cannot be, for never would I be likely to forget. I challenge you, mademoiselle, to speak my name."

"The Sieur Rene d'Artigny, monsieur."

"By my faith, the witch is right, and yet in all this New France I know scarce a maid. Nay look up; there is naught to fear from me, and I would see if memory be not new born. Saint Gilles! surely 'tis true; I have seen those eyes before; why, the name is on my tongue, yet falls me, lost in the wilderness. I pray you mercy, mademoiselle!"

"You have memory of the face you say?"

"Ay! the witchery of it; 'tis like a haunting spirit."

"Which did not haunt long, I warrant. I am Adele la Chesnayne, monsieur."

He stepped back, his eyes on mine, questioning. For an instant I believed the name even brought no familiar sound; then his face brightened and his eyes smiled as his lips echoed the words.

"Adele la Chesnayne! Ah! now I know. Why 'tis no less than a miracle. It was a child I thought of under that name—a slender, brown-eyed girl, as blithesome as a bird. No, I had not forgotten; only the magic of three years has made of you a woman. Again and again have I questioned in Montreal and Quebec, but no one seemed to know. At the convent they said your father fell in Indian skirmish."

"Yes; ever since then I have lived here, with my uncle, Hugo Chevet."

"Here!" he looked about, as though the dreariness of it was first noticed. "Alone? Is there no other woman?"

I shook my head, but no longer looked at him, for fear he might see the tears in my eyes.

"I am the housekeeper, monsieur. There was nothing else for me. In France, I am told, my father's people were well born, but this is not France, and there was no choice. Besides I was but a child of 14."

"And 17, now, mademoiselle," and he took my hand gallantly. "Pardon if I have asked questions which bring pain. I can understand much, for in Montreal I heard tales of this Hugo Chevet."

"He is rough, a woodsman," I defended, "yet not unkind to me. You will speak him fair?"

He laughed, his eyes sparkling with merriment.

"No fear of my neglecting all courtesy, for I come beseeching a favor. I have learned the lesson of when the soft speech wins more than the iron hand. And this other, the Commissaire Cassion—is he a bird of the same plumage?"

I made a little gesture, and glanced back at the closed door.

"Oh, no; he is the court courier, to stab with words, not deeds. Chevet is rough of speech, and hard of hand, but he fights in the open; Cassion has a double tongue, and one never knows him." I glanced up into his sobered face. "He is a friend of La Barre."

"So 'tis said, and has been chosen by the governor to bear message to De Baugis in the Illinois country. I seek passage in his company."

"You! I thought you were of the party of Sieur de la Salle?"

"I am," he answered honestly, "yet Cassion will need a guide, and there is none save myself in all New France who has ever made that journey."

"'Twill be well for him to listen to my plan. And why not? We do not fight the orders of the governor: we obey, and wait. Monsieur de la Salle will tell his story to the king."

"The King! To Louis?"

"Ay, 'twill not be the first time he has had audience, and already he is at sea. We can wait, and laugh at this Cassion over his useless journey."

"But he—he is treacherous, monsieur."

He laughed as though the words amused.

"To one who has lived as I, amid savages, treachery is an old story. The commissaire will not find me asleep. We will serve each other, and let it go at that. Ah! we are to be interrupted."

He straightened up facing the door, and I turned, confronting my uncle as he emerged in advance. He was a burly man, with iron gray hair, and face reddened by out-of-doors; and he stopped in surprise at sight of a stranger, his eyes hardening with suspicion.

"And who is this with whom you converse so privately, Adele?" he questioned brusquely, "a young popinjay new to these parts I venture."

D'Artigny stepped between us, smiling in good humor.

"My call was upon you, Monsieur Chevet, and not the young lady," he said quietly enough, yet with a tone to the voice. "I merely asked her if I had found the right place, and if Monsieur the Commissaire Cassion was still your guest."

"And what, may I ask, might be your business with the Commissaire Cassion?" asked the latter, pressing past Chevet, yet bowing with a semblance of politeness, scarcely in accord with the studied insolence of his words. "I have no remembrance of your face."

"Then, Monsieur Cassion is not observant," returned the younger man pleasantly, "as I accompanied the Sieur de la Salle in his attempt to have audience with the governor."

"Ah!" the word of surprise exploded from the lips. "Sacred! 'tis true! My faith, what difference clothes make. I mistook you for a courier du bois."

"I am the Sieur Rene d'Artigny."

"Lieutenant of La Salle's?"

"Scarcely that, monsieur, but a comrade; for three years I have been with his party, and was chosen by him for this mission."

Cassion laughed, chucking the gloomy faced Chevet in the side, as though he would give point to a good joke.

"And little the trip hither has profited either master or man, I warrant. La Barre does not sell New France to every adventurer. Monsieur de la Salle found different reception in Quebec than when Frontenac ruled this colony. Where went the fur stealer?"

"To whom do you refer?"

"To whom? Heaven help us, Chevet, the man would play nice with words. Well, let it go, my young cock, and answer me."

"You mean the Sieur de la Salle?"

"To be sure; I called him no worse than I have heard La Barre speak. They say he has left Quebec; what more know you?"

"'Tis no secret, monsieur," replied D'Artigny quietly enough, although there was a flash in his eyes, as they met mine. "The Sieur de la Salle has sailed for France."

"France! Bah! you jest; there has been no ship outward bound."

"The Breton paused at St. Roche, held by the fog. When the fog lifted there was a new passenger aboard. By

dawn the Indian paddlers had me landed in Quebec."

"Does La Barre know?"

"Faith! I could not tell you that, as he has not honored me with audience."

Cassion strode back and forth, his face dark with passion. It was not pleasant news he had been told, and it was plain enough he understood the meaning.

"By the saints!" he exclaimed, "'Tis a sly fox to break through our guard so easily. Ay, and 'twill give him a month to whisper his lies to Louis, before La Barre can forward a report. But, sacre! my young chancier, surely you are not here to bring me this bit of news. You sought me, you said? Well, for what purpose?"

"In peace, monsieur. Because I have served Sieur de la Salle loyally is no reason why we should be enemies. We are both the king's men, and may work together. The word has come to me that you head a party for the Illinois, with instructions for De Baugis at Fort St. Louis. Is this true?"

Cassion bowed coldly, waiting to discover how much more his questioner knew.

"Ah, then I am right thus far. Well, monsieur, 'twas on that account I came, to volunteer as guide."

"You! 'Twould be treachery."

"Oh, no; our interests are the same so far as the journey goes. I would reach St. Louis; so would you. Because we may have different ends in view, different causes to serve, has naught to do with the trail thither. There is not a man who knows the way as well as I. Four times have I traveled it, and I am not a savage, monsieur—I am a gentleman of France."

"And you pledge your word?"

"I pledge my word—to guide you safe to Fort St. Louis. Once there I am comrade to Sieur de la Salle."

"Bah! I care not whom you comrade with, once you serve my purpose. I take your offer, and if you play me false—"

"Restrain your threats, Monsieur Cassion. A quarrel will get us nowhere. You have my word of honor; 'tis enough. Who will compose the party?"

Cassion hesitated, yet seemed to realize the uselessness of deceit.

"A dozen or more soldiers of the regiment of Picardy, some couriers du bois, and the Indian paddlers. There will be four boats."

"You go by the Ottawa, and the lakes?"

"Such were my orders."

"'Tis less fatiguing, although a longer journey; and the time of departure?"

Cassion laughed as he turned slightly and bowed to me.

"We leave Quebec before dawn Tuesday," he said gayly. "It is my wish to enjoy once more the follies of civilization before plunging into the wilderness. The governor permits that we remain to his ball. Mademoiselle la Chesnayne does me the honor of being my guest on that occasion."

"I, monsieur!" I exclaimed in surprise at his boastful words. "'Twas my uncle who proposed—"

"Tut, tut, what of that?" he interrupted in no way discomposed. "It is my request which opens the golden gates. The good Hugo here but looks on at a frivolity for which he cares nothing. 'Tis the young who dance. And you, Monsieur d'Artigny, am I to meet you there also, or perchance later at the boat landing?"

"At the ball, monsieur. 'Tis three years since I have danced to measure, but it will be a joy to look on, and thus keep company with Monsieur Chevet. Nor shall I fail you at the boats; until then, messieurs," and he bowed hat in hand, "and to you, mademoiselle, adieu."

We watched him go down the grape arbor to the canoe, and no one spoke but Cassion.

"Pouf! he thinks well of himself, that young cockerel, and 'twill likely be my part to clip his spurs. Still 'tis good policy to have him with us, for 'tis a long journey. What say you, Chevet?"

"That he is one to watch," answered my uncle gruffly. "I trust none of La Salle's brood."

"No, nor I, for the matter of that, but I am willing to pit my brains against the best of them. Francois Cassion is not likely to be caught asleep, my good Hugo."

CHAPTER II.

The Choice of a Husband.

It was just before dark when Monsieur Cassion left us, and I watched

him go gladly enough, hidden behind the shade of my window. He had been talking for an hour with Chevet in the room below; I could hear the rattle of glasses, as though they drank, and the unpleasant arrogance of his voice, although no words reached me clearly. I cared little what he said, although I wondered at his purpose in being there, and what object he might have in this long converse with my uncle. Yet I was not sent for, and no doubt it was some conference over furs, of no great interest. The two were in some scheme I knew to gain advantage over Sieur de la Salle, and were much elated now that La Barre held power; but that was nothing for a girl to understand, so I worked on with busy fingers, my mind not forgetful of the young Sieur d'Artigny.

Chevet did not return to the house after Monsieur Cassion's canoe had disappeared. I saw him walking back and forth along the river bank, smoking, and seemingly thinking out some problem. Nor did he appear until I had the evening meal ready, and called to him down the arbor. He was always gruff and bearish enough when we were alone, seldom speaking, indeed, except to give utterance to some order, but this night he appeared even more morose and silent than his wont, not so much as looking at me as he took seat, and began to eat. No doubt Cassion had brought ill news, or else the appearance of D'Artigny had served to arouse all his old animosity toward La Salle. It was little to me, however, and I had learned to ignore his moods, so I took my own place silently, and paid no heed to the scowl with which he surveyed me across the table. No doubt my very indifference fanned his discontent, but I remained ignorant of it, until he burst out savagely.

"And so you know this young cockerel, do you? You know him, and never told me? Where before did you ever meet this popinjay?"

"At the convent three years ago. La Salle rested there over night, and young D'Artigny was of the party. He was but a boy then."

"He came here today to see you?"

"No, never," I protested. "I doubt if he even had the memory of me until I told him who I was. Surely he explained clearly why he came."

He eyed me fiercely, his face full of suspicion, his great hand gripping the knife.

"'Tis well for you if that be true," he said gruffly, "but I have no faith in the lad's words. He is here as La Salle's spy, and so I told Cassion, though the only honor he did me was to laugh at my warning. 'Let him spy,' he said, 'and I will play at the same game; 'tis little enough he will learn, and we shall need his guidance.' Ay! and he may be right, but I want nothing to do with the fellow. Cassion may give him place in his boats, if he will, but never again shall he set foot on my land, nor have speech with you. You mark my words, mademoiselle?"

I felt the color flame into my cheeks, and knew my eyes darkened with anger, yet made effort to control my speech.

"Yes, monsieur; I am your ward and have always been obedient, yet this Sieur d'Artigny seems a pleasant spoken young man, and surely 'tis no crime that he serves the Sieur de la Salle."

"Is it not!" he burst forth, striking the table with his fist. "Know you not I would be rich but for that fur stealer. By right those should be my furs he sends here in trade. There will be another tale to tell soon, now that La Barre hath the reins of power; and this D'Artigny—bah! What care I for that young cockerel—but I hate the brood. Listen, girl, I pay my debts; it was this hand that broke Louis d'Artigny, and has kept him to his bed for ten years past. Yet even that does not wipe out the score between us. 'Tis no odds to you what was the cause, but while I live I hate. So you have my orders; you will speak no more with this D'Artigny."

What dark scheme have Cassion and Chevet concocted which calls for the marriage of Adele la Chesnayne? Do you believe it probable that Cassion really loves the girl and would do well for her—or is this merely a method of getting the girl out of the way in a hard game of plotting between desperate and greedy men for the French king's favor?

(TO BE CONTINUED)